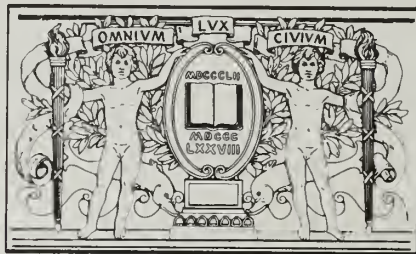


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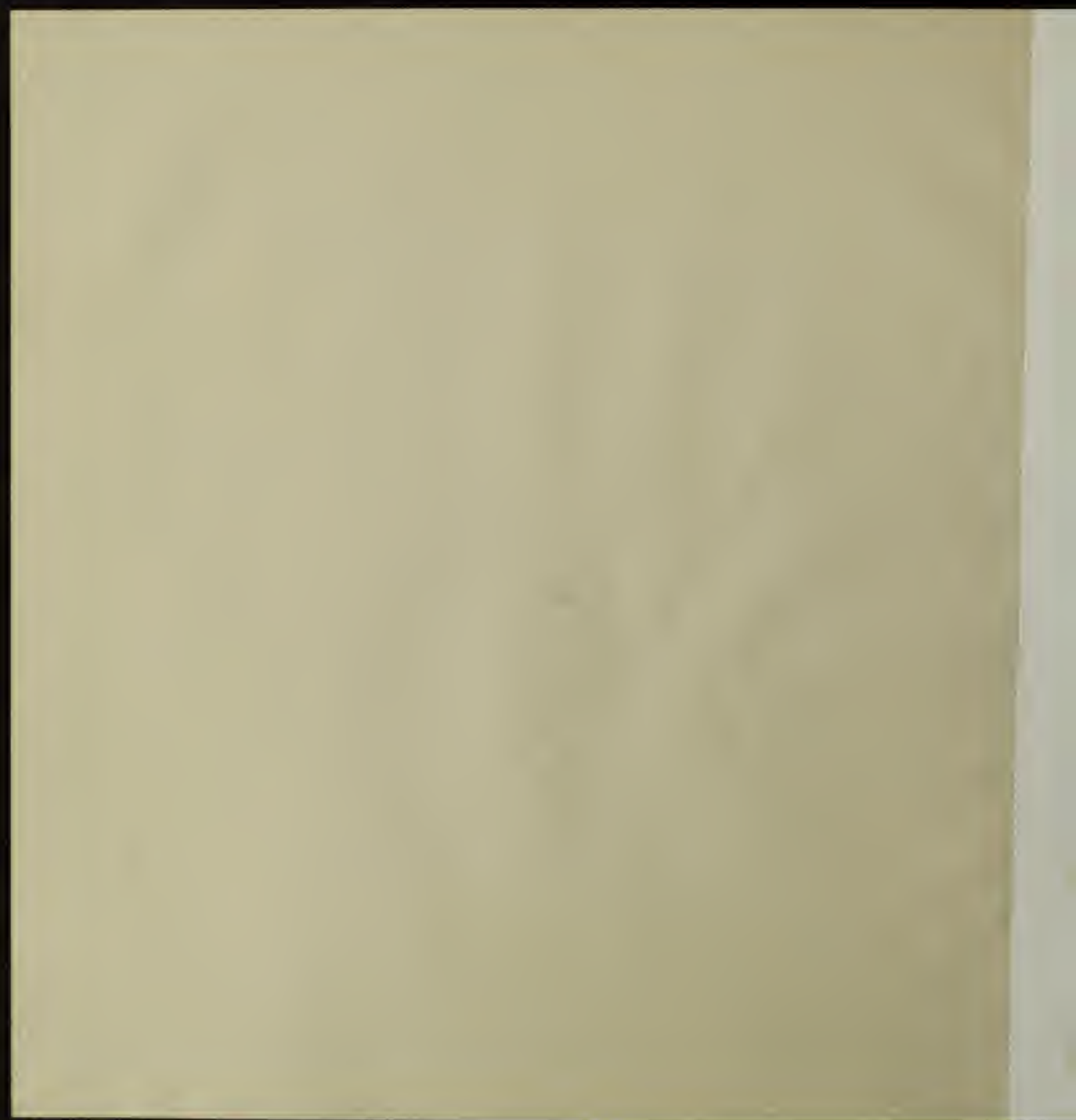
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# Charlestown

BOSTON 200 NEIGHBORHOOD HISTORY SERIES

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HENRY ADAMS, the nineteenth century philosopher, said that the history of America is not the history of a few, but the history of the many. The people of Boston's neighborhood accepted the challenge of Adams' statement to produce "people's histories" of their own communities. Hundreds of Bostonians formed committees in each of fifteen neighborhoods of the city, volunteering their time in the past year and a half to research in libraries, search for photographs, produce questionnaires, transcribe tapes, assist in writing and editing. Most important, act as interviewers and subjects of "oral history" research. These booklets are not traditional textbook histories, and we have not attempted to cull a statistical sample. We have simply talked with our neighbors, people who remember the city sometimes with fondness, sometimes with regret, but always with warmth. For each of us has his or her own story to tell, and these stories are vital to the development of our neighborhoods and our city.

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*Boston 200 is the city's official project to observe the Bicentennial of the American Revolution from April 1976 through December 1976.*

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# CHARLESTOWN

CHARLESTOWN, as a British historian has said, "the mother of Boston"—but the relationship between the two has been more like that of sisters, with interdependence of a family, as well as occasional ily squabbles. "Charlestown was a city in itself before it was annexed to Boston," as Mary Gillen asserts, it has always maintained pride in its independence particular identity.

Charlestown is older than Boston—English settlers came a year here before moving across the river. But before there was ever a Charlestown, the peninsula at the mouth of the Charles River was home to a group of people called the Pawtuckets, a branch of the Sagamore tribe. They called their land Mishawum, or Spring, after a fresh-water fountain which was usually overrun by tidewater. Their chief was Nanepashemit. At his death, most of his power passed to his widow, so when the English arrived, they found the peninsula largely under the rule of a queen, the Native Sachem. Although the queen and her people were friendly to the white settlers, they did not officially submit to the colonial government for almost fifteen years. Nanepashemit's son, Wonoquaham, "Sagamore of Mystic, who governed part of the peninsula, was easily anglicized. It was he who warned of an at-

tack planned by a neighboring tribe, so that the colonists would be quick to build and fortify their meeting-house on Town Hill.

The first Englishman to reside in Mishawum was Thomas Walford, a hermit who lived in a thatched hut at the same time the Reverend William Blackstone was setting up his farm across the river in Shawmut. The explorer John Smith had visited the area and mapped out the coast and river.

For several years, a number of royal subjects squabbled over the rights to the territory. Many people had claims on it, all apparently legal. In the meantime, a group of men from Salem decided to settle on the peninsula and reinforce their claim with "squatter's rights." On July 4, 1629, Prince Charles granted the area status as an independent town and bestowed his name upon it.

The new citizens planned their home carefully, allotting parcels of land bounded by stone fences, living in tents until they could build wooden houses and organizing a representative government called the "Courts of Assistants."

Charlestown was small, its land was difficult to farm, and it lacked a good source of fresh water. William Blackstone invited the despairing colonists to

ONT COVER: *The showers at the old Charlestown Park Beach now called Dewey Beach, c. 1916*  
IDE COVER: *Boy diving from Warren Bridge, 1940's*



*Painting by C. S. Coburn of the Charlestown Ferry which was established in 1775.*

come to live with him in Shawmut, which they re-named Boston. Only about 35 settlers stayed in Charlestown: they would become the core of the developing community.

By the middle of the century, Charlestown had grown into a fairly independent entity. Many different types of craftsmen used their skills to build the town—mid-seventeenth-century Charlestown boasted coopers, glaziers, joiners, wheelwrights, potters, shipwrights, tanners, tailors, tile makers, rope makers and, happily, brewers and distillers. A thriving mercantile section grew up along the waterfront. A ferry ran daily to the town of Boston. The main street connecting the ferry wharf to the waterfront soon spawned houses, shops and a busy marketplace.

By the time of the American Revolution, Charlestown was a prosperous seaport with high economic stakes in the success of the American cause. It was to play a primary role in the war for independence.

On his midnight ride in April 1775, the silversmith Paul Revere stopped in Charlestown to borrow a horse from Deacon Larkin so he could warn the country that “The British are coming.” Larkin lost his horse that night. When the British captured Revere, they decided to keep the horse as a cavalry mount.

Charlestown was the scene of one of the most glorious defeats of history. The Battle of Bunker Hill killed more British than the Americans and proved that the Americans could defend their liberties against superior numbers of disciplined and well-trained British soldiers. But the burning of the town in the British attack left practically nothing of the 156-year-old town. The British Annual Register reported:

The fate of Charlestown was also a matter of melancholy contemplation to the serious and unprejudiced of all parties. Charlestown was large, handsome, and well built, both in respect to its private and public edifices; it contained about four hun-





*Battle of Bunker Hill*

houses, and had the greatest trade of any port in the province, except Boston. It is now buried in ruins. Such is the termination of human labor, industry, and wisdom, and such are the fatal fruits of civil dissensions.

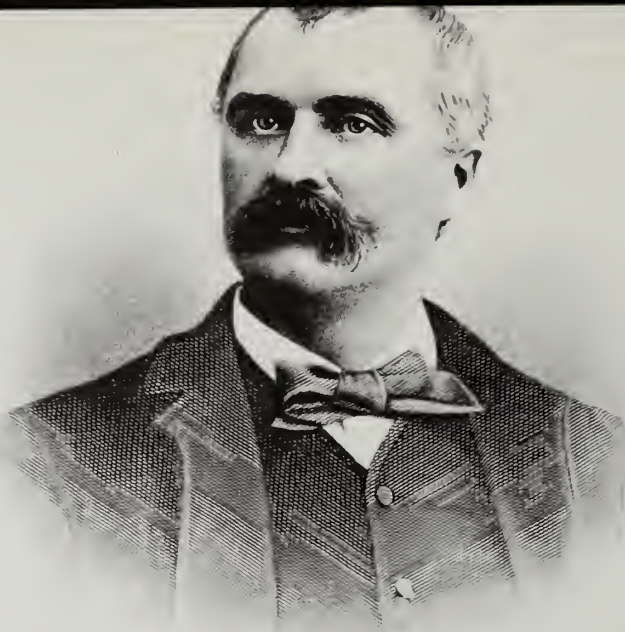
Refugees began returning after two years; by 1780 they had rebuilt 289 houses.

The transition from village to town to city was rapid. As Charlestown multiplied in population, it decreased in area, until the territory that had once included parts of Woburn, Cambridge, Malden, Everett, Lynn, Chelsea, and Boston, as well as Lovell's Island, had shrunk to a peninsula of one square mile. The town flourished as a port during the Golden Age of Sail. Many sea-captains built grand homes for themselves on its imposing hills. In

1802, the United States Navy established its second shipyard in Charlestown. The Navy Yard brought fame to Charlestown for the many famous vessels built here. Perhaps more importantly, it brought jobs for some of the thousands of immigrants arriving in Boston.

Of the foreign-born population in Boston at mid-nineteenth century, 85% were Irish. Many of these Irish immigrants, particularly those from Donegal, settled in Charlestown, attracted by dockside jobs. They lived in working-class houses which sprang up in the valleys and sections away from the harbor. As the Irish moved in, most of the old Yankee families moved out: by the turn of the century Charlestown was almost 90% Irish.

Annexation of the city of Charlestown to Boston in



*John Boyle O'Reilly*

1874 helped speed changes that were already in progress. Many of the wealthy, fearing the power the immigrants would have in a mushrooming Boston, left for the new suburbs, accelerating the transition of political power. As the Irish took over the city government, Charlestown people sought some of the action and entered local talent into the Boston political arena. One of Charlestown's most powerful citizens was not a politician but a journalist and poet, John Boyle O'Reilly. A patriot and political exile from Ireland, O'Reilly, as editor of the Irish newspaper the *Boston Pilot*, helped to legitimize the aspirations of the new Irish elite. The fiery oratorical tradition of O'Reilly and his compatriots, the Charlestown Irish "pols," continued into the twentieth century. Many town residents recall torchlight parades, street-corner rallies and political one-upmanship. And they remember how their political tra-

dition initiated a young, scrawny but spunky politician who moved from a Charlestown congressional seat to the White House as the first Irish president of the United States.

Twentieth-century Charlestown has experienced economic booms and hard times. Because of the importance of the Navy Yard to the area's economy, Charlestown has felt the currents of the economic tide in a more exaggerated way than the rest of the city. During the wars, the town's population burgeoned with new workers and ships' crews; post-war periods brought unemployment and deterioration.

In the last decade, despite the hardship of the Navy Yard's closing, Charlestown has moved into a period of resurgence. It took concentrated work for the town to get where it is today. In the 1960's, a period of u-

heaval came to Charlestown when the district was declared an urban renewal area. The original plan, recommending the demolition of over half the town's dwellings, generated intense community protest. Many people were forced out of their homes, never to return. Through hard experience, Charlestown has learned to deal with planners, to articulate community needs and to implement plans that will retain the neighborhood's character. Bunker Hill Community College has opened, low income and elderly housing has been built, new businesses have come to town and the despised "El" is finally only a memory.

Many new residents have come to Charlestown in the last decade—young professionals who are rehabilitating the area's fine old homes. Property values have skyrocketed, and rents as well, creating problems for some longtime residents and young Charlestownians who want to remain in the town.

One new resident describes the attraction of the town this way:

"Charlestown has a special charm of its own. People trusting each other. There's always been trust among neighbors: they go to each other and help one another and support one another when it's needed. I think this will continue as a dominant characteristic."

Despite changes and uncertainties, residents hope that the character that is Charlestown will remain intact into the coming decades, that Charlestown will not forget what it has been and what it is. The best way to understand Charlestown is to listen to some of its citizens. Taken together, their memories paint a vivid verbal picture of Charlestown's life through the 1900's.

*"Locally, I've always been political," says MARY GILLEN. She named one of her five children after Maurice Tobin, a former Mayor of Boston, and another after Robert Lee, the late Charlestown Representative. Maurice, who lives next door to his mother, has followed her footsteps and is active on many community boards; another son, Brother Francis, resides in the*

*Vatican. Mary is proud of all of her children, whom she says "will always be Townies." She talks of her family background, saying "we always had a lot of fun."*

"My mother settled here when she came from Ireland. She applied to be a cook on Auburn Street and, as she was just about to ring the doorbell, she saw a little notice inside the window, 'No Irish Catholic need apply.' So she turned on her heels and went back to the agency. She went to work for the famous Stickney & Poole on Seasoning Street. She worked with them until she was married. As a matter of fact, my parents were married at the Saint Francis de Sales Church. I was baptized there and my father was buried from there, so you'd call us real Townies—we're very loyal to the town.

"My father was, well, in the old days, you'd call it a bartender for Mike Riordan, whose son-in-law, Tom Flaherty, was a famous Congressman from this district. The store was on Medford Street.

"On Saturday nights, as a little girl, it was quite famous to get dressed up and go with mother. Horses and teams parked along Main Street, with the vegetables and all sorts of things. For us youngsters, it was an outing, a ritual, something like the North End market district is now.

"The Irish originally came from the North End. Charlestown was all Yanks, very proper. The houses on Auburn Street that are now three-families were one-family with servants. When the Irish started moving into Charlestown, the Yanks started moving out. Then the Italians came, but the Irish were here first. Their children grew up and haven't left the town. The old Irish called us 'Narrowbacks,' the descendants of Irish parents.

"I remember skating at Sullivan Square. We didn't ride the streetcar which cost five cents. We really enjoyed our skating; we had a wonderful time. Then, as we grew older, we went to dances. Wherever we were dancing, we saw everybody we knew, ceiling to floor. The dance floor was called a spring floor. I think there





were only two or three of them in Massachusetts. The darn poor building—I think it's a factory or something like that now.

"My husband also was Charlestown born and bred. He was quite a basketball referee. We used to have very famous basketball games every Saturday night at the high school against different councils throughout the city. Our big rivals were Pere Marquette, Southie and the Fittons from East Boston. After the games, my husband and I went dancing.

"I met him at the basketball games. He came from the hill section and I was a valley girl. The area near St. Catherine's was called 'the Point' and around Sullivan Square, 'the Neck.' Everybody came to know everybody else at dances and basketball games.

"Charlestown was an excellent place to raise children. My mother was widowed when I was a year and five months; she was extremely strict. When I grew up, I was extremely strict with my children and they're none the worse for it. When they started school, I said to the nun, you can give them the stick whenever they need it, because they'll never come home and tell me about it or I'll give it to them again. I never had a problem with my children and they're bringing their children up the same way . . . of course, growing up, I imagine they resented it.

"The town is seeping with history. This is Bunker Hill, where the Monument is. The Battle of Bunker Hill was fought on Breed's Hill. Bunker Hill really has no value historically, only that it's Bunker Hill, the top of the hill.

"On the seventeenth of June, Bunker Hill Day, people came from far and near. We saw people who had moved out of Charlestown twenty, thirty years before. On the night before the seventeenth, the Armory was the place to be. Tickets were very reasonable, two dollars; the city paid the rest of the expenses. The entertainment was fabulous. It was a great night for the politicians who would be running in September. You'd be sure to see them all.

"It was an all-night affair. At twelve o'clock, we went to Sullivan Square to see the fireworks. It was like two o'clock in the afternoon—everybody walking along, saying hello, talking.

"Then, in the morning, the doll carriage parade for the children, with lollipops and ice cream. We had a marvelous 'Horrible' in which the residents of Charlestown dressed as bears, clowns, Tarzans.

"There were band concerts at Sullivan Square, square dancing at Hay Square and St. Catherine's. So it was the whole week. Every house was open; people walked in and they were welcome. Everyone was so so happy to see folks.

"The rallies in Charlestown were fabulous! The night before election all the candidates arrived in City Square. Everyone headed for City Square. People who formerly lived in the town headed for City Square. They would get out of the elevated and stand on the platform. The square was jammed with people. James Michael Curley always made sure he was the last and even if it was half-past-two in the morning, everyone waited for him.

"The elevated has been running for the last 30 years. My mother rode in it when it was first built, she was one of its first passengers. I would like to be one of the last.

"That's really what is holding us up now—the elevated. Charlestown is going to be tremendous with all this redevelopment—people have taken such interest in doing over their homes. The absentee landlords just collected rent. They didn't care. They let homes go until they were just falling apart. We got after them; the city got after them. As a result they were torn down and people built new houses.

"People let Charlestown slide because they felt, what's the use? Then they saw other people fixing their homes and they started in. It's the pride in the town now to have your house done.

"It's amazing. You will never, never find a 'for rent' or 'for sale' sign. Once in a blue moon you might,



but it's snatched right up. People out of town want to come back. They had no interest in it before, when they lived here. They felt the town was dying. Now they see what a difference it makes, when everybody takes an interest. Charlestown will once more be very beautiful. I won't live to enjoy it, but my grandchildren will.

"I say: when I leave here, they'll have to carry me feet first."

*One of Mary's sons, Robert, is a Lieutenant Commander in the Navy, now stationed at Virginia Beach. Mary talks about him fondly:*

"My son Robert—going into the Navy from English High School taking courses, coming up the ladder to a Lieutenant Commander—it's a lot of hard work. He's married to the most wonderful girl, my Paula. She's from Dublin. When he was in Africa, he wrote home and said, I have a chance to go to Jerusalem or Ireland. Which would you prefer me to take? I wrote back and said, 'Go to Ireland and visit where your grandmother lived and see the forge where your grandfather used to shoe horses.' When he and another young sailor got to Dublin, the train for Cork was gone, so he said to the clerk in the hotel, 'How can a couple of Yanks spend the evening?' He sent them to a dance. There was my fair Paula. Then he went down to Cork and visited his grandmother's and saw the old homestead. I was very proud because I knew I'd never see it. After that he used to take trips to Dublin to see Paula. When he was transferred back to Washington, he had to take trips to England; he'd always drop over. So they were married.

"She's the most wonderful person. Robert may have had the brains to study and he really put his time into it, but Paula deserves credit too, because she was willing to go along with it. A lot of girls will reject the idea of all that time and study.

"When he became an officer in the Navy, my son wrote his thesis on the subject he knew best, Bunker

Hill. As a little boy, he used to recite the history of the Monument. Nobody taught the boys that history, they had to overhear it and learn it for themselves."

*In an excerpted section of the thesis Robert wrote for Officer Training School, he gives a picture of the resourcefulness of youth and the continuity of an oral tradition reminiscent of the old "shanachies," the story-tellers of Ireland:*

"The industrious young boys of Charlestown demonstrated the same resourcefulness associated with the men who fought at Bunker Hill. A number of youths ranging in age from six to sixteen, gather on the steps leading up to the Monument. They are there to earn money by reciting the history of the Monument to the great number of tourists who visit it each year.

"The history has been gleaned from a number of sources, refined through usage and developed by the youths of Charlestown over a period of many years, until it is now a concise synopsis of the history of the Bunker Hill Monument.

"If a boy has an older brother or friend who is willing to teach him the history, he is fortunate. Most youngsters go through a very difficult apprenticeship contingent upon two things: to learn the history; second, daring. Usually, the only method of learning the history is to eavesdrop while one of the older boys recites it. Each boy who has learned the history does his utmost to keep newcomers from learning it. The newcomer is chased away from a car when the history is being recited to its occupants. He is chased away from the ever-decreasing number of tourists who venture forth on foot.

"There are only two approaches a youngster can take to eavesdrop successfully while the history is being recited. He might boldly place himself beside an older boy who is reciting the history. This leads to many an altercation. With a fast left and a strong right, he can sometimes overcome his first hurdle. This course of action is hazardous. Realizing after a series of bloody noses and blackened eyes that his fast left and strong

*Top of the  
Bunker Hill Monument  
with a view  
of Charlestown, 1925*



ght will not serve him in all cases, he soon comes  
out to a new tack.

"The wisest course of action, and one by which the  
newcomer saves face, literally and figuratively, is to  
keep away from a car when the recitation begins and  
then casually approach it on the side opposite his re-  
sistant instructor. With the voice of an innocent cher-  
ub, the youngster asks the oldest person in the car, pre-  
ferably a woman, if it will be alright for him to listen.  
Invariably the answer is, 'Why certainly!' Not want-  
ing to jeopardize his position . . . at this point, the an-  
gry young orator continues the recitation at as fast a  
pace as possible, exactly as the newcomer hoped. The  
occupants ask the orator to repeat a portion of the his-  
tory, which is then firmly implanted in the spongelike  
mind of the newcomer.

"When the young orator has finished, there is a  
moment of silence until the woman nudges her com-  
panion and whispers, 'Give him a tip.' Our aspiring  
newcomer is off and running. In most cases, he has too

much of a head start to be chased but, occasionally, if  
he has aggravated the same orator too many times, a  
race follows that sometimes lasts for hours. In the Bos-  
ton School track meets, Charlestown High School wins  
consistently.

"Slowly, surely, sometimes painfully, the newcom-  
er learns the history. The oldest and biggest boys are  
the ruling class. If one of them decides that a youngster  
knows his history well and is industrious, he may spon-  
sor him. The newcomer's duties include detecting ap-  
proaching cars before anyone else and reporting them  
to his sponsor. The sponsor observes the approaching  
car. If it looks promising, he recites the history himself.  
The make, model, age and particularly the state of reg-  
istration, play an important part in evaluating the  
car's potential. Out-of-state cars have good potential  
and the sponsor usually will reserve them for himself.  
He also reserves all expensive cars. Occasionally, the  
newcomer recites the history himself. For example, the  
newcomer spots an approaching 1940 Ford with Mass-





*Carriages passing the Edes house at the corner of High and Elm Streets in a June 17th parade, 1890*

achusetts license plates. His sponsor decides that it probably won't be worth too much and allows the eager newcomer to recite:

'This monument stands two-hundred and twenty-one feet in height. It has two-hundred and ninety-four winding stairs and no elevator. It is built entirely of pure Quincy granite, hauled here from the quarries of Quincy on the first horse-drawn railroad ever built in this part of the country. The statue you see on the foreground is that of Colonel William Prescott who is said to be standing in the same attitude and position as when he gave his most famous and bravest command: 'DON'T FIRE, BOYS, UNTIL YOU SEE THE WHITES OF THEIR EYES. AIM LOW AND PICK OFF THE OFFICERS

FIRST.' At this command, more than twenty-five percent of the British officers were killed or wounded. The British made three attempts to gain this hill. The first two were unsuccessful. On the third attempt, the Americans ran out of ammunition and, using their rifles as clubs, were forced to retreat. Marquis de Lafayette, a French ally and also a French General, laid the cornerstone in 1825, while young Daniel Webster gave the oration for the day. 'Let it rise, let it rise until it reaches the sky for the brave men who have fought and died here.' This hill is really not Bunker Hill, it is Breeds Hill. Bunker Hill is three-quarters of a mile northwest in that direction (youngster points), containing no historical value whatsoever. This hill was three times its present height when the battle took place but has been cut down to its present size, and the

dirt taken from it was used to fill in Morton's Point, which is now known as the Charlestown Navy Yard. They say the quickest way up this monument is to walk up, and the quickest way down is to roll down . . . it takes two weeks to recover from the bump. (Always leave 'em laughing.)'

"Dumbfounded by the flow of facts and figures the driver often asks: 'How did you ever learn all that?' and 'Why did you go to all the trouble?' The lad answers the first question, 'By studying very hard.' Then, solemn-faced, he answers the second question: 'To earn tips by reciting it to tourists.' There is hardly a case on record where this reply did not reap a good-sized tip, twenty-five or fifty cents.

"The youngster reports back to his sponsor. If the tip was twenty-five cents, he is allowed fifteen cents for himself. If the tip was fifty cents, it is divided equally. While this is more than acceptable at first, it isn't too long before the lad realizes the injustice he is suffering. In a short time, the largest tip he reports is fifteen cents; a dime for him and a nickel for his sponsor.

"The sponsor takes the young lad aside and explains the rewards of being honest and the consequences of holding out. It isn't long before the talk wears off. Eventually, all newcomers slip back into the habit of reporting fifteen cents as the largest tip.

"The sponsor then uses a different approach. 'If you are honest with me the rest of this summer, I will put you up next summer.' The newcomer is overjoyed, for to be 'Put Up' means he will be his own boss and can retain the entire amount of any tip he receives. If the newcomer is exceptionally shrewd he agrees, provided the sponsor will take him along on all the guided tours around Boston that he talks tourists into.

"During the remainder of the summer the lad earns the automobile routes through the City of Boston. This is a great feat in itself, as will be attested to by anyone who has driven through the asphalt-covered

cow paths that wind their way around Boston. All proceeds from these guided tours go to the sponsor. However, when the season is over, our newcomer will be on his own. This is where most of the money is made.

"The amount a young guide charges for his services usually ranges from two to three dollars per hour. There have been many cases where a young boy has earned enough money by reciting the history and conducting tours through Boston to pay for his clothes from the time he is eight until he is in his final years of high school. During the tourist season, earnings for one day's work in the amount of eleven dollars is not too unusual. One young lad, at the age of twelve, earned twenty-five dollars one Saturday. These earnings, less a few cents for ice cream, coke and other essentials, are turned over to the boy's parents. Often, the money is put aside for the youngster's future education.

"As the boy reaches fifteen or sixteen, he begins to look down on history-telling as kid stuff. The experience he gained in the years at the monument will never leave him. Probably the most important thing about this experience is that the youngster has been working and earning money for himself and his family. If he is earning money for his new bike, he doesn't have time to get into trouble. Still, he receives his fair share of hard knocks—to learn the history, to be 'Put Up,' to insure that he isn't badgered out of his share of out-of-state cars, is indeed a tough row to hoe.

"Some of these boys, fully grown men now, hold jobs like Treasurer of the State Police, Custom Inspectors, Chief Postal Inspector, Judges, State Representatives and State Senators. One man, Dave Powers, was Special Assistant to the President of the United States. I even know of one young fellow who joined the Navy as an enlisted man, worked his way up and is now a commissioned officer.

"I think my feelings about Charlestown's Bunker Hill might be best expressed by paraphrasing an old saying 'You can take the man out of Charlestown and





*Nason's market  
late 19th century*

away from Bunker Hill, but you can never take Charlestown out of the man, nor Bunker Hill from him.'"

*"I'm proud to say I come from Charlestown, I was born and raised here," says DAN MAGUIRE. Dan was one of eleven children, "and times were tough—but there was nothing depressing about my childhood." One of Dan's first jobs, at sixteen, was on the docks. Now he's an iron worker. He and his vivacious wife, Greta, enjoy life with their children on Eden Street.*

"My father was a milkman. I used to go out with him on bitter cold mornings. We didn't even have to use the reins on our horse because he knew the route around Parker Street. We got up about four o'clock in

the morning, went down to Hood's Milk here and loaded the wagon. We had to be extremely careful on icy days. If we were going down steep hills, we used the brake drag—a curved, arced hand brake. The horse knew we were going down the hill; we'd all just take our time. A couple of times on slippery days, we left the wagon at the bottom of the hill. We had to walk up with milk carriers that held eight quarts of milk, four on each side.

"Some of the kids were a little jealous because I earned extra pickup money. My father gave me about a dollar a week, which I thought was fabulous at the time. There were other companies that used to deliver milk—White's, Hurley's and Whiting's. People used to buy extra milk and leave Hurley's and Whiting's bottles

outside. We collected all the bottles in the dark hallways. At the end of the day, three o'clock in the afternoon we took all the store bottles and cashed them in for a nickel each.

"I always played ice hockey, baseball and football at the Barry Playground, nicknamed the 'Oily.' We had contests in football, a rivalry between the sections of Charlestown. I hung around with some guys; we called ourselves the Hawks. We were a football team, a baseball team, an ice hockey team. There were also the Cobras from Elm Street and the Washington Street gang.

"The only mischief I got into was stealing rides on the MBTA, the old Boston Elevator. I squeezed the bars, and hopped street-cars, and rode up and down Bunker Hill Street, until my father caught me one day. He really layed it on me, not so much for riding, but if I fell off, I would have gone right under the wheels of the car.

"I remember one time my brother and I and a kid named Keene went over to South Station and spotted a moving train. 'Oh, we'll jump on that.' So we did. Pretty soon it built up momentum, and we couldn't jump off. We wound up in Providence, Rhode Island. I think that was the most exciting ride I have had to date, but we were scared, we were really scared. We were afraid to stick our heads out the freight car door. Finally we went to the Providence police with our tails between our legs. I learned from experience about hopping freight cars. I fell off one and wound up in Arlington City Hospital. I still have a scar from it.

"We went swimming down at the 'Oilies,' where barges came in for E. S. Morse, Glendale, Bashford and Woodimore to unload their oil. We swam behind Mishawum Park. I remember two tragedies down there where ships used to unload timbers, mahogany timbers. They dumped them in there, crisscross, and the tide would move them around. When they were ready to process them through the mill, they took out one at a time. We used to play down there, not know-

ing the dangers of the tide shifting those logs. One kid drowned down there. He went down between the logs. There was no way to get him or hold him.

"I went sledding down Pleasant Street—the streetcar nearly got me once. I came down on a sled one wintry night and didn't see the streetcar. I veered in and I hit what they call snappers now. I almost drove my head through the wall down there.

"Everybody was pretty regular and up and up. But one of the cops thought it was great to pick on kids—back-handing them for stealing an apple or an orange off the fruit stands.

"We went about twice a week to the Thompson Square Theater, which we nicknamed the 'Hippy.' There was the Hollywood Theater then, too.

"I had my own money from working or saying the history of the Monument. It wasn't like today—kids are able to buy Hondas and Kawasakis. I was lucky to have a two-wheel bicycle.

"My mother always provided ice skates and roller skates for us. Many nights we used to go to Balaroue in Medford to roller skate. I was a fancy skater then, but I wouldn't put skates on now."

*Brought up in the West End in "a family that's very sensible and practical," running a boarding house turned out to be a natural for HELENE SHERKANOWSKI RUSH. Mrs. Rush is a sturdy, deep-voiced woman who thrives on hard work and common-sense problem solving. She drove a jeep and fork-lift a couple of years in the Navy Yard. It was there she met her husband, John.*

*Mrs. Rush and her sister, Mary Sherkanowski, turned their boarding house experiences into a best-selling book, Rooms To Let. Here Mrs. Rush tells how she got into the business that was to become her life's work and how she came to Charlestown.*

"Little did I know that a simple ad in the *Globe* would change the course of my life for the next 30 years. It advertised two large corner rooming houses opposite the historic Bunker Hill Monument in



*Monument Square  
houses # 21-26*

Charlestown. I was interested. The town was centrally located; the Navy Yard was an asset; and my husband John and his family were Townies. It was worth considering.

"I was impressed by the five-story brick house. It was solid, imposing, with much granite—a Queen Ann style. Instantly, I decided to buy it.

"The owners were lovely people and very honest. Elated, I came to an agreement to buy. The owners then went into a private huddle and decided to sell their other house first. I felt bitter disappointment. Their huge four-story, red brick townhouse was on the opposite corner. The outside was fairly presentable, but the interior was deplorable. Still, its very large, sunny, high-ceilinged rooms, its hardwood floors, marble fireplaces and curved stairways held a certain charm.

"When I asked the landlady for her lowest price for both properties, the price she quoted was more than I could afford and my heart sank.

"Desperately, I thought of all my friends who might be interested and found none. Nervously, as I opened my purse in search of a cigarette, my long nails caught in the zipper side-pocket, partly exposing a wad of bills, which my sister Mary had given me to purchase some jewelry.

"Only the night before, Mary had asked me to buy her a pair of diamond earrings to match her wristwatch. She knew I had taken a three-month course in the study of diamonds and entrusted me with \$500 to purchase them.

"Then a bolt of lightning hit me! My sister was the best selection for that house. There in my bag was enough for a down payment. I had her Power of At-



orney, which I had sometimes used in the past, because of her mixed time schedules, due to her position as a practical nurse. I mused on. Surely, a landlady's position would be much easier, more profitable; interesting and even exciting. Best of all, we would be together. I knew if I called her, Mary would not make a quick decision on this matter. Taking a deep breath, I lunged! Time was of the essence!

"When I left the owners, I was walking on air. In my bag, I had two sales agreements, drawn by an attorney. I had burned my bridges behind me.

"Riding home in deep thought, I wondered at my nerve, I must have gone mad! I had not only spent Mary's jewelry money, but worse, I realized it would take most of her life's savings to buy, and renovate that house. The thought unnerved me and I dreaded facing her with my news.

"At her apartment, she greeted me pleasantly asking, 'Well, did you have any luck? Did you buy anything?'

"Yes, I bought a lovely house on the Square.' In the next half hour, I gave her all the details.

"Well I'm very happy for you. I'll take a month's leave of absence and help you with the moving and things. Let's have a highball and celebrate your first new home.' She turned and headed for her corner bar and began to mix the drinks.

"The worst was yet to come.

"Make mine a double,' I ordered.

"A double? What's the matter? Don't you feel well?"

"I'm a little tired,' I mumbled.

"Well, that's over with. What else is new?" she asked casually.

"I bought you a house,' I answered weakly. She popped and turned.

"I must be hearing things. I thought you said you bought me a house.' She continued stirring the ice.

"I *did* say it . . . I *did* buy it . . . It's all yours! Kill

me, if you want. That's it! It's all done! Here is your legal agreement.' I handed it to her.

"She stared, speechless. She read the agreement she held in one hand, while she gulped *my* double highball in the other.

"This is unbelievable! What will I do with an ark of a house? I have a beautiful apartment, a good job, a fat bank account, no responsibilities, my freedom; I was happy. Now, you've changed everything. I just *can't* believe it! What got into you? Why? That's what I want to know. Why?"

"Listen, Mary, this will be your very own house, your own business. You'll be working for yourself; you'll make good money. It will be easier. We'll be together and help each other,' and I went on and on and on . . . far into the night.

"Thirty years have passed! Mary never got her diamond earrings, but over 10,000 people from all walks of life, from all over the country and parts of Europe have lived in our homes. We learned that a sense of humor is necessary, not only in our business but in life, for 'It takes all kinds of people to make the world go round.'"

*SAM DONNELL sits with both hands firmly on his knees. His salt-and-pepper beard, wiry frame and incisive gaze give him the look of a sea-captain from Boston's China Trade days. A descendant of a Yankee family from Dedham, tracing back to Colonial days, he fits into the Charlestown city-scape almost anachronistically. He talks of restoring the imposing old homes of Charlestown to what they were in Victorian times.*

"One rainy day I walked in the Parish Hall at the Episcopal Church and said, 'Is the Reverend Cutler here?' He said yes. He was wearing a linen duster and pushing a broom, sweeping up the hall.

"I'm interested in buying a house in Charlestown, an old one that I can fix up.' That's all I was interested in—old houses—and Charlestown was handy. So I bought 23 Pleasant Street.

"I lived there four or five years. I bought the lot in front of it from the City of Boston. They came out and raised a little red flag and I went out to bid on it. Then I bought two more houses, moved to the big one and rented the small one. Later I started to live in this house. The foundations were gone. When I leaned on the kitchen sink that was up against it on legs, the whole thing would fall. So I would have to run out in the snow and push the side of the house back. I got heat in it the first winter. None of these houses ever had any heat. The one next door doesn't have any heat now. They have a gas heater of some sort.

"I went to work on the yellow house down at 81 and 81½ Warren Street. There's the single house—the one that was originally built in 1873 with three flats in it—and then the yellow house which was the first house on the place. I fixed up those two quite well and I had a chance to buy these two. The old lady died. She had lived in the far end of the house and when she died, her family wanted to get rid of the property. They asked around and, of course, I was the logical one to buy it. I went and bought the two with the money I inherited, twenty-five hundred dollars, and I've been fixing them up ever since.

"The houses are all built around an empty lot. I built a nice garden there. It used to be a public dump for the street. Everybody threw tin cans rocks, everything they didn't want in there. We hauled two old cars out of it years ago, before I put a fence up. I wouldn't put a fence up till I owned the land.

"Charlestown joined Boston to get public utilities, new ones. We never got any till recently. The City of Boston was supposed to put in new sewers and all this business. They never did. They just took over Charlestown and collected taxes from it. There aren't any fire departments practically. The city keeps taking them out and sending them to Brighton and everywhere else. There was one down by the project and a couple on side streets but they're all gone. They sent them somewhere else, closed them up.

"Charlestown's been resettled, you might say about three or four times. Originally, by the Yankees. A lot of them left at the time of the Revolution, after the town burned. Then a new batch came by. The lived here till about 1840 or '50. And a lot of the Irish came. And after the Irish, a lot of people from Nova Scotia came. They were English or Irish, either one but usually Protestants. They usually inter-married with Irish.

"A lot of people moved out. As they got married the young people went off to live in Billerica and Wilmington and other suburbs. They were living in the country. Charlestown's the only place they have neighbors they've known all their lives. They want to be near them. So they want to come back and there aren't enough houses. People are coming in, buying houses and fixing them up. We're having a migration."

*The son of Irish immigrants, JOE LYONS moved away from his native Charlestown in 1952 and returned three years ago. His father worked longshore and his mother cleaned buildings to help the family through the Great Depression. He remembers hard times, as well as a close family life and community celebrations.*

"As a teen I didn't have too much time to play. I had to work. But there was some social life. I was a ballroom dancer. That was my fun.

"The churches had their activities. They had social dances and they used to put on minstrel shows at St. Mary's, St. Catherine's and St. Francis's.

"We had movie houses and three ballrooms in the town at one time: Roughan, Hibernian and Cotton Hall.

"A lot of young people went to the Bunker Hill Monument on dates.

"On Bunker Hill Day in the 1920's we used to have a horrible parade and a fireman's parade, and the parade in the afternoon would last until about five o'clock. The Knights of Columbus had a banquet before the seventeenth of June, a big time at the Armory



*Saturday morning at the Farmer's Market on Adams Street, 1951*

won a big cup in the waltz contest with my wife. The last big party they had there was in 1952. That was the same year I left. Vaughn Munroe was the orchestra leader. My wife and I won the waltz contest that night.

"Christmas was always celebrated here as a big thing. Not as elaborate then as today. In those days we had little candles on our Christmas trees and had to be careful not to set fire to our houses.

"Easter—all the mothers and dads made sure their children were dressed to the highest fashion and hoped it would be a good Sunday.

"We had rallies for politicians when I was a teenager. Congressman Flaherty used to borrow my truck to have his rallies on. He put a piano on it and we'd sing. There were rallies in Sullivan Square, City Square, Thompson Square and Doherty Park. Rallies in every corner. Lots of people came. It was like a parade.

"Bond Bread was first known as Fox's Bakery. Then it became the General Baking Co. and, finally, Bond Bread. They had a barn where they used to shoe their horses.

"When I was a youngster, we didn't have any trouble in this town. Because mom or dad made sure they knew where their kids were. This town and the North End were known as the two best little areas in the city with very little delinquency. Children knew what to expect. The neighbors would spank them. Kids didn't get away with anything in those days. Everything was under control. That's the difference in the town today. . .

"We got up in the morning at seven o'clock. School was at nine. And we'd hurry. We didn't have showers. We washed in a big tub. We cleaned up and put on shirts that had been ironed the night before. We went up the street to school, the Old Kent School. It's still



there. Kids today get a break if it snows or rains. But we couldn't stay home. And we enjoyed going up the street in the snow. I enjoyed going to school. I loved school.

"Church was more important then. I graduated from Catechism and then went two years to Bible History. We were told to go. And we went. Things have changed. Today children go to church not even dressed up. It's a pity. I had to wear a necktie and a starched shirt to church when I was a youngster. Father McCoy was the pastor at St. Catherine's. He new every kid who went to Confession. He'd be at your house to tell you didn't go. They had one of the most beautiful choirs. The church was packed to the rafters every Sunday upstairs and downstairs, from 6:30 to 11:30. Now it's like a morgue. There's nobody in there. People don't go to church like they used to. They don't bother.

"None of the oldtimers are left. I'm one of the oldtimers of the children of the oldtimers that were here. There's very few of us Townies still living here."

*ELLIE MARINO represents the third generation of her family to grow up in Charlestown; her mother, now 81, has lived in the town since she was three years old. Mrs. Marino is one of a family of ten. She has six brothers and three sisters. Like her father and her grandfather before him, three of her brothers work longshore.*

"Before the housing project came in, this was a beautiful little town. When I was small, we lived out on Bainbridge Street, down at Hay Square. But the federal authorities took over the parcel of land where we lived for a housing project.

"Urban renewal was something that you thought you read in a magazine—this couldn't actually happen. The town was divided in half. Even now, there's a little resentment.

"When urban renewal began I was 100% for it, because we did need something. We needed a face lift. Urban renewal was going to rehabilitate people's

homes and help the little people out, the poor people. The houses would all be remodeled, I figured.

"When they first started urban renewal, we had meetings to see who was going to be in charge. Come to find out, that had been decided in the Mayor's office about four months before we realized what was going on!

"They gave a book to all the people. The print was so fine, not many people could read or understand it. This booklet had a map which said only a few houses were to be torn down. When the bigger map came out it showed quite a few houses. Mine was one, so, naturally, I was pretty upset.

"Finally, we took it to City Hall. You wouldn't believe what happened there. The majority of the people that went into City Hall were against urban renewal. Only a handful were for it. But the day the vote was supposed to take place, we knew what was going to happen!

"As a result, we started a self-help organization. We wanted to do rehabilitation ourselves. Give us the money, but don't tear down good homes! Get the federal government out! We made up our own newspaper and called it *The Minuteman*. We went around door-to-door and passed it out. On Friday night, we baked up cakes and sold them at our self-help organization. This is how we raised money for our attorneys.

"We sent to Washington for all the by-laws, all the facts on urban renewal, and we realized urban renewal wasn't going to help the little people.

"The whole town would have been levelled if it weren't for the people of the self-help organization. We saved quite a few of the homes in our town. If it weren't for the self-help organization we would have had another West End!

"The majority of the people that were in the organization are still living in the town. The majority of the people that were for urban renewal are living out of town.

"Since urban renewal came in, we don't have the



*City Square Station  
before the elevated  
tracks were laid*

ood old Charlestown. On a Saturday night on Main Street years ago, there'd be forty, fifty families walking round doing their shopping. Everybody was sociable. Today, you don't find two people walking along. We don't have the bars we used to have, like the Shamrock Village down on Hancock Square. It was a place to go to dine and dance and eat. Everyone got together. Years ago, we had two theatres. We went to the movies on a Sunday afternoon. We got an extra candy bar if two of us sat on the same chair together—that's how many people used to fill the Thompson Square Theatre! Today we don't have a theatre here. In our teens, we had a bowling alley here, but today we don't. Yet, we have twelve leagues that commute out of town. When my own children were growing up, they had the Girl's Club. But today we don't. We don't have any of these

things for children, and people wonder why all the kids hang on the street corners!

"The BRA has done more damage to the town than good. Before urban renewal came in, we had the five-and-ten and a lot of different places to shop down on Main Street. All those stores are now boarded up. The owners didn't know whether they were going to be taken by eminent domain or not. Finally, they went out of business. Now we have two stores in the whole town!

"The only thing urban renewal did for Charlestown was to help the bankers and developers. They claim this is progress! To tell you the truth, I think we're going backwards instead of forward.

"This is the only area of Charlestown where there is no urban renewal and that's why I bought my prop-

erty here. It's a nice area—we all have gardens in front of our houses and everybody keeps their property up.

“As we tried to say that day in City Council, we do not need more projects. I think the little people are just as good as the rich people. They shouldn't be all blocked together. If they lived next to someone who had a nice home, one would help the other out, like when we grew up. There were some that were well-to-do and some that were poor, but one would help the other out. You wouldn't find any place better than Charlestown. It is the prime land of Boston. This is why I fought so long for the town. I was born here, I'm here and I'm here to stay.”

*MARIE ALVES is a homemaker and lifetime resident of Charlestown. Her six brothers and sisters have moved away from the town, but Marie likes her life here and is committed to the community, playing a primary role in many neighborhood organizations. SHEILA NEVIN is a young single woman, who moved to Charlestown almost by chance, and feels protected and accepted in a neighborhood where “everybody knows everybody else.” MAURICE DULLEA was attracted by the town's architecture. He's lived here almost six years, and plans to stay “for the foreseeable future.” The three talk with one another about Charlestown's pluses and minuses and what it means to be a Townie.*

MAURICE: “I'm a city planner and I liked the characteristics that I saw in Charlestown. It has what I consider a liveable scale. It hasn't been changed a great deal. People who've been in Charlestown a long period of time think the changes brought about by urban renewal have been extensive. But having been able to look at Charlestown from a distance and seeing what urban renewal has done to other sections of Boston and elsewhere, I realized that this was basically still a small village in a large city. There was already a small community of young professionals when I moved in and, in the past five years, I'd say it has grown considerably.

If you tried to meet and get to know every new person in town, you just couldn't do it.”

SHEILA: “I've lived in Charlestown for about twenty years. I came here from Melrose only because I found a pretty good apartment for little money and I wanted to live in town. I had no intention of living in Charlestown. I went to school in Boston. I used to take the train through Charlestown everyday and I was always impressed coming home from school at night when I looked at the sunset on Bunker Hill. In my neighborhood everybody knows everybody else and everybody knows me. It's just outside of Thompson Square. As I understand it, just about everyone is related to everyone else with the exception of myself. I haven't really met that many people in Charlestown my own age but I work outside and most of my friends are people that I've gone to school and grown up with. They live in other parts of Boston. It's unfortunate. There don't seem to be many people here in their middle or late twenties who are single.”

MAURICE: “Maybe I've gotten myself into more activities and organizations than Sheila, but I've found a rather pleasant mix of older people, younger people, people in between, male people, female people, long time residents and new arrivals. That's the kind of composition of the Preservation Society, in Charlestown 200 and The Bunker Hill Museum, organization that I've been active in.”

MARIE: “When I first got married, my husband was going to night-school in Boston and we found Charlestown very convenient, so we decided to stay until he finished school. Charlestown was just in the grip of urban renewal and we thought it could be a better place. A lot of old buildings really needed to be taken down and a lot of new buildings should have been put up. I'm well satisfied that we've stayed. Most of my friends and family have moved out.”

MAURICE: “I can't really say that I'm close to many of the long-time residents that I met. I've even





*Dedication of housing project, 1941*

countered a little hostility but not a great deal. People are usually friendly. The people that I've become most friendly with have been people that are more or less my own age, more or less professionals. But I'm sure if my experiences were limited to that alone I would have moved out by now. I like the mix and the diversity of people."

MARIE: "We stayed because we felt we had something to offer to the community. We felt that we could impress upon people the historical wealth that is here. If anyone has a problem in this town, people will understand it and help you. If you just had a baby, there will be somebody to help you; if it's the busing situation, people will understand it's your choice to think

as you wish. Urban renewal has divided the town. There's still some hard feelings, but people haven't stopped talking to each other."

MAURICE: "My impression of the effect of renewal on Charlestown, apart from the physical changes, is that people have been forced to deal with a rather anonymous, autonomous institution, the BRA, which isn't the sort of organization the people in Charlestown are used to. They're used to dealing directly with City Hall through whatever contacts and political pull they had. BRA is a separate kind of organization that they haven't been able to confront and communicate with as successfully. This has probably created a good deal of frustration."

MARIE: "When urban renewal first came to Charlestown I lived in an area I knew would be demolished, on Main Street across from Westland Avenue. At the very beginning, twelve years ago, urban renewal authorities told us we were going to be displaced. I really feel that urban renewal was much different then. People can pick up the phone now and talk to Arthur Riley at the BRA. Before, you were almost afraid to call."

"I think the new professional people in Charlestown have added a lot. One new person that's moved into town whom I've felt very close to is Joe Conley. He's done a lot of art work and this past spring I had him design a garden for me. He collected all the old cobblestones from Charlestown so we could use them. He did a fantastic job."

MAURICE: "Maybe one of the effects of the recent influx of professional, business and skilled people has been to show people who live here that many from the outside world see something great about Charlestown. A lot of new people are Townies in spirit, people who care about their community. A friend of mine who has lived here thirty-five years says she's still not a Townie. Yet she has put her heart and soul into the town and its organizations. She's helped where she could."

SHEILA: "I think of a Townie as someone who

represents the best and worst of Charlestown. The kid in my neighborhood—their language and manners and everything about them—is Charlestown. When moved in the neighborhood kids spoke so very politely to me. Even now, they come over and carry in my groceries. But when I listen to them talking to each other the language is so foul—they're only about twelve and listen to them! It's interesting because they react to different ages so differently."

MAURICE: "I consider Charlestown the way I consider a good friend—someone I like being with and respect and feel free to criticize at the same time. People are discovering Charlestown. People from outside will continue to move into Charlestown because it is like an antique. As Charlestown continues to gain popularity, people who have lived here because they have been able to afford it will be priced out. The diversity will increase at the expense of a lot of people. Charlestown has a special charm of its own—people trusting each other. As the place opens up I don't see how it can stay at the same level. People don't trust outsiders as much as those they have seen around all their lives."

*Mention Charlestown in Roslindale, Dorchester, or any section of the city, and someone is sure to say, "Oh! you must know MARY COLBERT." In many ways, Mary is the best of Charlestown—warm, full of energy and good humor. It was Mary who started the Doll-Carriage Parade on Bunker Hill Day and who helped give a young Congressman his start in politics. Mary has always managed to be there in any town emergency. A couple of years ago she was instrumental in getting free city mini-bus service for the elderly. And when the "EL" finally met its death last summer, Mary, who's been working toward that moment for 60 years, broke a champagne bottle against the first girder to be taken down.*

*A petite woman with well-ordered, snow-white hair, brilliant blue eyes and firm, determined posture, Mrs. Colbert, at 86, is still, as her countless admirers attest, "a beauty."*

"My mother was born in 1859 on Moulton Street. Her brother was one of the bakers at the George Fox





*Kindergarten class of 1904-05 in the old Training Field School on Common Street*

bakery on Edgewood Street. For years and years, he worked there. My grandmother lived near where McCartney's Store is now, on Hunter Street, and, afterwards, when my mother's brother married, he had a house on Hunter Street. So they really were ground lots.

"My father's people were the Coughlins. They

came over in the old sailing vessels. Took them I don't know how many weeks to cross. My grandmother came from Killarney and my grandfather came from Kilkenny.

"I was born in 1890, right on Main Street. Next door, they had a musical instrument place and that's where I was born, upstairs in that house. I was born in





*Baseball team, 1911*

the valley and moved to the hill section. I spent all of my childhood living in Charlestown.

"My mother was up in the morning when we came down to breakfast. On the back of the stove, she'd have three apple pies already cooked, a bunch of biscuits, a loaf of gingerbread.

"I can see her now . . . She was 74 when she died and nobody could ever do anything for her; she did all her own washing and she didn't have the things to do it with that we have today. She didn't have electric

lights, but I can remember her having a little old-fashioned lamp with a little candle on the side. Our bedrooms were on the third floor and when we went to bed at night we took this little lamp up through the hall.

"I often wonder when I see the conveniences the kids have today, how our mothers did what they did. Maybe Mrs. O'Brien or Mrs. Walsh was ill and the kids went to school with us. When we came home at noon, besides having a pot of beef stew for us, she would have a pot for that lady's children. 'Mary, tak

hat in to Mrs. O'Brien's house.' We don't see any of hat today—everybody's so busy.

"My mother was a lot like myself, interested in what went on in the district. Things were different; there was a much closer neighborhood association. My mother always worked for different societies, like the Carney Hospital or St. Mary's Infant Asylum. She always had something to do and she had something for me to do after school. I always did errands for her.

"When it was suppertime, we sat down and ate our supper. There were four of us children, three girls and the boy, and after supper, that's where we belonged, around the table in the house. My mother would tell us stories.

"We really didn't look for recreation on the outside at that time; we were kept pretty busy by what went on in the district.

"I can remember Pearl Street. The snow was always so high once winter came we hardly ever walked on the sidewalk. We walked along those high mounds of snow. The streets were always full of snow, nothing like it is now—we don't know what it is to really have a bad snowstorm.

"And I can remember the streetcars, the open cars, on Bunker Hill Street. They fitted about six or seven on the seat and we had to step up on the floor first and then into the street-car. Oh, I can just see that car coming down Bunker Hill Street now.

"There was always something at the church to keep the kids interested: shows, operettas and different things. We had Saturday morning classes to prepare for first Communion and Confirmation. Two o'clock in the afternoon, we went to church for confession and we usually had a choir rehearsal with the nuns. Sunday morning we got up for Mass and stayed for catechism. Sunday afternoon, we went to instructions and benediction.

"In the summer, we had an opportunity to do bunche girls' work. I can remember Hoose and Hender-

son's at the corner of Temple Place, opposite Jordan's. A couple of summers before I graduated from high school, I went in there. The salary we got hardly paid for lunch, but, nevertheless, it kept us busy.

"I met my husband in the bowling alley. Mr. Colbert belonged to the Knights of Columbus. At that time, we had four teams bowling in the Knights of Columbus Hall. He kept score for my sister's team. There was a girl on my team—all the men needed to say to her was, 'Now right down the alley, Mona' and, she'd get so nervous, the ball would miss. It got so that one night I turned around and said, 'Now why don't you keep still and leave her alone?'

"This night he walked up the street with me. I said, 'Oh, it's too bad that some of those men don't keep their mouths shut.' He stood outside the door talking and he said, 'Would you be busy next Sunday night?' And I said, 'Oh, yes I am.' He walked off. Shortly afterwards, another night, he walked up with me and the first thing I knew, he was inviting me out. I went with him maybe two-and-a-half years or more.

"My husband thought the valley was the only place in the world—it's where he came from. And I'd say, 'Don't forget, you came up the hill to get somebody when you wanted to get married!'

"He'd say, 'I used to deliver papers . . . at Larell's on Pearl Street . . . I suppose you were the dirty-faced kid.'

"And I said, 'Oh, no I wasn't.' There were two sisters besides me and when we would come down the street, the boys would be at the corner. My sisters would go by. They might say hello . . . walk along. Of course, I'd come along and say, 'Oh, how are you?' He thought, here's the sister that talks to people. The other two are stuck-up. That was the reputation I had.

"My first involvement in politics was on an awful cold night . . . I think it was Curley's very first campaign. I was to meet a girl on Bunker Hill Street and we went to the *Globe*. At that time, it was on Washing-





*Electricity class at the Charlestown Boys Club, 1909*

ton Street and they flashed the returns, ward by ward, on the outside.

"I was involved in the Roosevelt campaign in 1932. I remember when Roosevelt won. I didn't think I should just take off and go to Washington to the inauguration. So Mr. Colbert said, 'You go ahead, you go with them.' So I went to that first inauguration. I can still see Jimmy Roosevelt coming in with his father. I

went to all of his inaugurations and I went to Truman's, Eisenhower's and Kennedy's.

"I was a very hard worker for Jack Kennedy. In fact, a hassock that's down in the cellar was the first place he sat in this room and talked about whether he was going to run for local office or take a crack at Congress.

"I said to him, 'Knowing your background, I



think that you would be wise to go for Congress, rather than for the local sect. You're going to have a lot of headaches in the state and maybe you'll have them in Washington, but it will be different.' He said, 'When I make up my mind, I'll call you.'

"Ten days afterwards, he called me to go to the Bellevue. I went in and he said, 'I'm going to run for Congress. I'd like you to work with Dave Powers.' We opened the first headquarters down at the corner of Walker and Main Streets. Charlestown was one of the first places, and he never forgot it.

"The first year he was elected to Congress, he evidently had some Hotel Bellevue paper with him on New Year's Eve and he sat down and wrote a letter. He said, 'This is a long-belated letter. I should have written it long ago, but I figured that I'd be able to get in contact with you personally and see you. I could not in 1946 go by without thanking you for what you did for me and letting you know that one of the things that stands out most in my whole campaign is the friendship I made with you and Syl.' I treasure that paper.

"I don't think anybody sold Jack Kennedy; he sold himself. He came over here, he went around to the different clubs and to the mothers in their houses and spoke. His brother and his father visited the place several times. We had a very active committee for him here. . .

"I've been 14 years the state treasurer for the Disabled American Veterans and am still going on with it. I belong to the American Legion. I served six years at Jamaica Plain Hospital on a closed ward.

"Mrs. Corwin and I were the two people on the Red Cross Disaster Team for Charlestown. We went out on every second- or third-alarm fire. We had a pass to go through the lines. We used to go down on Ruford Avenue and set up a stand. We'd serve hot coffee and tomato juice, to cut the smoke. Many's the night we went. I can recall one night . . . I had a black and white hat—it was all white facing—and I wore it down



*Snow fort, 1960*

to the fire . . . When I got home that night the whole hat was black.

"I think we hear a lot of people say they're bored and lonely. There's ample opportunity for them to give a few days or minutes and go through those places and see what good they could do. I don't do these things to get something in return. I feel that if I am able, if someone at sometime or other needs something in one of these places, that I've been able to do a little bit for them. That's been my secret of hard work."

*Ordinance Park, Charlestown Navy Yard, mid 19th century*



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Boston enjoys an international reputation as the birthplace of our American Revolution. Today, as the nation celebrates its 200th anniversary, that struggle for freedom again draws attention to Boston. The heritage of Paul Revere, Sam Adams, Faneuil Hall and Bunker Hill still fire our romantic imaginations.

But a heritage is more than a few great names or places—it is a culture, social history and, above all, it is people. Here in Boston, one of our most cherished traditions is a rich and varied neighborhood life. The history of our neighborhood communities is a fascinating and genuinely American story—a story of proud and ancient peoples and customs, preserved and at the same time transformed by the American urban experience.

So to celebrate our nation's birthday we have undertaken to chronicle Boston's neighborhood histories. Compiled largely from the oral accounts of living Bostonians, these histories capture in vivid detail the breadth and depth of our city's complex past. They remind us of the most important component of Boston's heritage—people, which is, after all, what the Bicentennial is all about.

KEVIN H. WHITE, *Mayor*



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